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SUBJECT: VIGOROUS POPE CELEBRATES 83RD BIRTHDAY BY  
CANONIZING FOUR, RECEIVING DEGREE, AND ADVOCATING HUMAN  
RIGHTS

1.(U) AN INCREASINGLY VIGOROUS POPE JOHN PAUL II  
CELEBRATED HIS 83RD BIRTHDAY MAY 18 BY CANONIZING FOUR NEW  
SAINTS IN A MASS BEFORE TENS OF THOUSANDS OF WELL-WISHERS.  
DESPITE HIS LIMITED MOBILITY, THE POPE WAS IN TOP FORM.  
WITH A STRONG, CLEAR VOICE, HE URGED THOSE PRESENT TO PRAY  
FOR HIM "SO THAT GOD WILL HELP ME TO FULFILL FAITHFULLY THE  
MISSION HE HAS ENTRUSTED TO ME." VATICAN OBSERVERS HAVE  
ABANDONED THEIR 2002 SPECULATION THAT THE POPE WOULD RESIGN  
BECAUSE OF ILL HEALTH AND NOW MARVEL AT HIS RENEWED  
STRENGTH AND VITALITY THAT VATICAN OFFICIALS ATTRIBUTE TO A  
REGIME OF SPEECH AND PHYSIOTHERAPY, GOOD DIET AND  
APPROPRIATE MEDICATION FOR PARKINSON'S DISEASE, WHICH  
SENIOR VATICAN CARDINAL GIOVANNI BATTISTA RE PUBLICLY  
ACKNOWLEDGED MAY 17 AS A SOURCE OF THE POPE'S DIFFICULTIES.

2.(U) A DAY EARLIER, THE POPE RECEIVED AN HONORARY  
DOCTORATE IN LAW FROM ROME'S "LA SAPIENZA" UNIVERSITY,  
WHICH IS CELEBRATING ITS 700TH ANNIVERSARY. THE AWARD  
RECOGNIZED THE POPE'S PAST AND CONTINUING CONTRIBUTIONS TO  
THE UNIVERSAL AFFIRMATION OF THE RIGHTS OF MAN, OF JUSTICE,  
AND OF PEACE AMONG INDIVIDUALS AND NATIONS. THE CEREMONY,  
ATTENDED BY ITALIAN PM BERLUSCONI AND MEMBERS OF HIS  
GOVERNMENT, BECAME AN OCCASION TO RECALL THE POPE'S  
QUARTER-CENTURY OF PROMOTING HUMAN RIGHTS. IN HIS ADDRESS,  
THE POPE HIGHLIGHTED A FULL AGENDA OF HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES  
FOR WHICH HE CONTINUES TO FIGHT: THE RIGHT TO HUMAN LIFE  
FROM CONCEPTION TO NATURAL DEATH; JURIDICAL PROTECTION FOR  
THE HUMAN EMBRYO; FREEDOM OF RELIGION; PROTECTION FROM  
DISCRIMINATION BECAUSE OF RACE, LANGUAGE, RELIGION OR SEX;  
THE RIGHT TO PRIVATE PROPERTY; FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION AND  
EXPRESSION, PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL LIFE, AND ECONOMIC  
INITIATIVES; THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION AND CULTURE; THE RIGHT  
OF MINORITIES TO EXIST AND EXPRESS THEIR PARTICULAR  
CULTURE; THE RIGHT TO WORK AND TO WORKERS' RIGHTS; AND THE  
RIGHT OF THE FAMILY NOT TO BE USURPED BY SOCIETY AND THE  
STATE. OF THESE RIGHTS, THE POPE EMPHASIZED THE RIGHT TO  
LIFE AS "THE MOST FUNDAMENTAL," WHILE OBSERVING THAT  
RELIGIOUS FREEDOM "WAS NOT SIMPLY ONE RIGHT AMONG OTHERS,  
BUT THAT TO WHICH ALL THE OTHERS ARE CONNECTED."

3.(U) COMMENT: DESPITE SPECULATION BY THE MEDIA AND SO-  
CALLED "VATICANISTI" THAT THE HOLY SEE IS "IN A HOLDING  
PATTERN" WAITING FOR THE POPE TO DIE, THE REALITY IS QUITE  
DIFFERENT. THE POPE MAINTAINS AN ACTIVE IF CIRCUMSCRIBED  
DAILY SCHEDULE, GUIDES LONG-TERM INTERNAL DECISION MAKING,  
CONTINUES TO TRAVEL -- THIS YEAR'S SCHEDULE INCLUDES SPAIN,  
CROATIA, BOSNIA, SLOVAKIA AND MONGOLIA, AND TO PROMOTE HIS  
INTERNATIONAL AGENDA FOCUSED ON RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS  
AND THE PROMOTION OF HUMAN DIGNITY . WHILE THE POPE HAS  
SCALED BACK ON SOME ROUTINE BUSINESS, AT 83, HE HAS BECOME  
INCREASINGLY ADEPT AT CONSERVING HIS ENERGY FOR WHAT IS  
MOST ESSENTIAL TO THE HOLY SEE'S DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN  
POLICY AGENDA. END COMMENT.

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